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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000909

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [FR](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA ON LATEST LEBANON CRISIS

REF: STATE 49259

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) We passed reftel points on Lebanon early in the day May 9 to French MFA DAS-equivalent Ludovic Pouille. In a subsequent meeting, Pouille stated that French FM Kouchner was engaged in active telephone diplomacy with Lebanese political faction leaders to urge restraint and respect for the Lebanese constitution and institutions. The only leader Kouchner had not so far been able to reach was parliament speaker Nabih Berri. Beyond the Lebanese, Kouchner had also reached out to Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa, who will preside over an emergency foreign ministers meeting in the next couple of days in Cairo at Saudi request. Kouchner, according to Pouille, was thinking about contacting Iranian FM Mottaki, since Iran was probably the only external power able and potentially willing to exert a restraining influence on Hizballah at this stage. Pouille flatly ruled out a phone call to Syrian FM Mu'allim. We understood at the end of the meeting that a possible phone call was being organized between the Secretary and Kouchner. The French Presidency announced that President Sarkozy had spoken by telephone on Sunday May 11 with Prime Minister Siniora and Saudi King Abdullah.

¶2. (C) Pouille described the situation in Lebanon as confused, primarily because the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in general and LAF Commander Sleiman in particular was "ambiguous." He noted reports that some LAF units had occupied March 14 sites Hizballah had captured or destroyed. The French were also hearing accusations by some March 14 leaders that at least some parts of the LAF had been complicit with Hizballah. Pouille described much of the March 14 leadership as in hiding or hunkered down in fortified locations. He considered it significant, however, that Hizballah had only attacked non-governmental targets and thus avoided any actions that could be interpreted as an assault on state institutions.

¶3. (C) The French have not concluded that a total breakdown is inevitable, but Pouille stated that the general GOF analysis was that things could not go back to the way they were. In classic French fashion, he posited three potential outcomes: (1) a return to the status quo, which he deemed unlikely to the point of being impossible, (2) some sort of scenario in which Hizballah and its allies extract major concessions from the current Lebanese government that would net them key victories in terms of composition of the

government (notably a new prime minister to replace Siniora and early parliamentary elections), and (3) a total breakdown of government authority that could lead to a new civil war. One variation on the second possibility would be a sort of "military coup," with the LAF installing Sleiman as the head of a new government replacing Siniora or a related scenario in which the currently silent Michel Aoun emerges as a prospective national savior (and thus fulfilling his longstanding ambition to become president). Pouille also posited that some sort of face-saving solution may be possible regarding the sacking of the Beirut airport's security chief, General Shugayr, but the government's challenge to Hizballah's communication network was something Hizballah could not and would not compromise over. The issue of the communication network was of longstanding, and Pouille wondered why the Lebanese government had pressed the issue so hard and now. It suggested the Saudis or some other outside power had urged the Lebanese to act in this way. (Comment: Pouille's list of possible suspects pointedly included the U.S.)

14. (C) The French remain pessimistic about the chances that diplomacy will yield any meaningful resolution of the overall crisis. Pouille said that, French public statements notwithstanding, the GOF has given up any hope that the Arab League can do anything to beef up or move forward with its efforts. As for the UNSC, Pouille said that France is reluctant to pursue a UNSC resolution. It would accept a modified version of the press statement released May 8 in New York to serve as a PRST. He doubted, however, that a resolution could secure sufficient support (maybe only eight votes). In addition to familiar arguments about "Lebanon fatigue," Pouille, whose previous post was in New York, asserted that there is little the UNSC could call for that

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would be enforceable. Worse, in his view, debating a resolution calling for strong action or appearing to take sides with the Lebanese government could have the immediate effect of dramatically polarizing the situation in Lebanon and driving Hizballah to go even further than it already has.

One idea that Pouille had was to consider following up on the idea of periodic videoconferences involving the "Friends of Lebanon" group as was agreed in Kuwait. He expressed the hope that such a virtual gathering could be arranged the week of May 12. (We understood this is going forward today.)

15. (C) Pouille said that security conditions were severely restricting the movements of French diplomatic personnel in Beirut. Nevertheless, the French were publicly trying not to contribute to panic and have discouraged any thoughts that an evacuation of French citizens is under consideration. Pouille asked whether the USG had issued or would consider issuing a similar statement to reassure the Lebanese government and public that a mass exodus of foreign nationals was not imminent. According to the Presidency spokesperson, in his call to Siniora and Abdullah Sunday, Sarkozy reiterated French support for the legitimate Lebanese government and its security forces who should have the monopoly of the use of force in the country. Sarkozy firmly condemned the recent violence, called for an unconditional cease fire and condemned any foreign interference in Lebanon.

The French President also called for immediate dialogue under the auspices of the Arab League to find a comprehensive and lasting solution to the crisis based on respect for Lebanon's democracy, independence, sovereignty and unity.

16. (U) We understand the French embassy in Washington has passed to the Department a copy of the FM Kouchner's press statement on the situation in Lebanon dated May 9.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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